

Breaking Binaries – with Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan, Transcript (from www.suhaiymah.com)

Season 2, Episode 1: Liberal/Fascist

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Anonymous Guest (A): And we can see that at the same time as all of these fantastic Bills of Rights were being drawn up, you know, that was a time of massive slavery and massive colonialism, where, you know, the "universal rights of man" were, you know, from the very outset when they were written down, just absolutely not applicable to all people because some people just weren't "human enough".

Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan (S): Salaams, peace and blessings, you're listening to Breaking Binaries Season Two with me, your host, Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan, known online as @thebrownhijabi. As a society, we're obsessed with explaining our world through the use of straightforward opposing categories. So good or bad, moderate or radical, pretty or ugly, victim or villain, the list goes on. All these sets of binaries, though, tend to be quite superficial. And they hide the real complexities, the politics and the nuances of how we've been encouraged to think. Following from the conversations of season one. Every episode this series, I'll be sitting down with a different friend to break down, break apart and interrogate a different binary and see how doing so helps us think more critically about ourselves and our world, and therefore, how we transform it.

For this week's conversation, I sat down with a really good old friend who has chosen to remain anonymous, we talked about the binary of fascist and liberal, which seems increasingly relevant in the times we're living in, and especially in light of the recent US presidential win of Joe Biden, a lot of people are hailing this as a huge victory, and the end of fascism. And I think this podcast will help us to think more critically about that, although our focus is not the USA and we managed to cover a lot of other contexts, primarily Britain and Sweden. So, I hope you find it useful. And I hope you find it as insightful and exciting as I did.

So, welcome to season two, of Breaking Binaries, I'm so glad to have you here at last, been a long time coming. How are you doing today?

A I'm doing well. Thanks. How are you?

S I'm good. I'm good. I am excited. I feel like we both have loads to say. So I feel like this is something we can just jump straight in on. Today's binary is something that I think in this moment, in this global pandemic, you know, increasing refugee crisis, economic pandemonium. Everything we're seeing across the world I think it feels just more relevant, than ever, it feels that we're gonna have so much to say. And I, I don't necessarily know that this conversation will be structured in the same way that all the other ones are because there's so much to cover. So just gonna open the door and see what happens. Today's binary is fascist and liberal. Both those times I think can be quite loaded. They can be used in ways where it's like, "oh, you're such a fascist", "oh you're such a liberal". And they just become these very, like pejorative, put-down, flat terms. So I think an important start point is just like, what what actually is a liberal what actually is a fascist, you know, who is one? Where do I find one? What does it mean to be one? Can I ask you to start there and maybe give us some like, groundwork?

A Yeah, I think when we talk about liberals, we're talking about liberalism, the dominant kind of political, philosophical ideology in Europe, America, what we call the West. At its core, we've got a liberal "democracy", we've got rule of law, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, civil liberties, but also the free market, and the criminal justice system, just kind of the way in which we do things,

crucially focusing on kind of the freedom of the individual, or that's how it is put, right. So that's generally what we talk about when we're talking about liberals and liberalism.

S Right. And I think- I mean, in the British context, I think it kind of stems as well, from this whole like, like liberalism, capital L, liberalism, you know, this was like a, an ideology or politics. And yeah, I think that we kind of have this narrative in Britain, and more broadly, in the west or Western Europe. That is, these ideas came from, you know, a movement about 200-300 years ago, where we kind of invented these great great concepts, and we love them, and that's what we use it for.

A Yeah. So and now they're kind of just a natural way of organizing all of our institutions everyday life. And encode, you know, they're coded into human rights and just everything you know, it's everywhere from the Enlightenment onwards,

S and we hear that a lot, right? We hear like, um, you know, a threat to "our liberal values" to "our democracies", to "our" this, this and I think that Yeah, that's a really helpful way of broadly conceptualizing it. So in that case, then who are the fascists? Where are the fascists?

A I think the fascists are the "bad guys" you know, the ones who are always painted out to be the bad guys. They are., far-right often, racist nationalist authorian. Historically, we think of Mussolini in Italy, Hitler in Germany. But you know, today or like in recent times in Britain, you probably hear more about the EDL the BNP, a few years ago, maybe even you UKIP. So it's kind of like far-right, authoritarian trends, what we call fascist. And basically, it's the opposite of the individual freedom for the individual. Right? It's the lack of that freedom, lack of those basic rights.

S And that's interesting, though, because already I'm starting to see a blur in the binary in the sense that, you know, the EDL's rhetoric or kind of far-right rhetoric is often about preserving and protecting these "freedoms" that you know, are what make Britain so great. That that then begins to- these people presumably don't see themselves as fascist, right? Fascists are- the people who are called fascists in the mainstream aren't people who want to put their hands and say, "Yes, I am a fascist", because it's not- no one wants to be a fascist right? Because being a fascist is always a bad thing to be.

A think I think Yeah, yeah. So there is a case where, obviously, the EDL wouldn't call themselves fascist, but maybe they would kind of use a similar rhetoric to be "protecting freedoms", you know, I mean?

S so yes, already, I guess, within each of those categories, there's ways that like, you might- they might not necessarily be seen so oppositional and I guess, is that it feels important, just because you gave the examples of like Mussolini and Hitler, that nationalism and fascism seems to go really hand in hand, and the kind of idea of like, possession over that nation, or kind of like, who/

A yeah an extreme form of that nationalism, I'd say, Yeah,

S right. Right. So very much to do with who the land belongs to and who the resources of the place, the people of the place are - defining what that place is. Because in World War Two, I'm just thinking about the classic rhetoric we have, it's like "Nazis trying to take our freedom, they invade France, Britain saves the French, the USA saves everybody, and everybody's free in the end and freedom won", and that's why we have grateful to our "war heroes" because freedom won

A yeah, it comes down to that classic binary of freedom and the lack of it. So it's like, I think the way they would be pitted against each other, liberals and fascists, also depends on who the state is for. And I think liberals would very much say that, look, "we're creating a state for everybody, you know,

we believe in equal opportunity, we believe in equality" is probably what a liberal would say. Whereas they would be very clear with no, that the fascist in being so nationalist, even being so racist, is very much opposed to these liberal ideas of kind of diversity, equality, equal opportunity. So I think that's another kind of key point where liberal would say that there's a difference.

S That's really interesting and that's also helpful, because I think that, you know, instantly, and I'm sure many of the listeners as well, instantly, there's a lot of red flags popping up here. What we've described a liberal to be, you know, doesn't really hold up to what we see. And I think what you just said, is a really good way into this. So this idea that like, liberal values are universal. So everybody, you know, in a liberal worldview, everybody experiences freedom, everybody experience or should experience democracy, free speech, etc, etc. And so I guess, like, you know, just being who I am in the world, a Muslim woman of color, a family who've come from, you know, previously colonized place to the UK, and knowing the other topics that we've discussed on this podcast so far, I think, is already quite clear that universal principles of freedom democracy, are not equally applied in the so called liberal West. So I'm starting to sense that there's something going on behind the scenes. So what for you is the sort of central issue that that begins to blur the boundary between liberals and fascists? Like what what's a good starting point or or vantage point to kind of see where these two things are not so clearly separable?

A It's really interesting. So I was just thinking, like, because you just said that, oh, as a Muslim woman, you know, that this, this is not the case. But I think the liberal kind of answer would be that "hang on, look, look, look, wait, wait up, you've got like access, you've had access to all these things, you've had access to education, you've had an equal opportunity, you can apply for whatever job there's nothing, no structures in place that should keep you out of any institution out of wealth. You know, it's a free market, you can go and start a business and do whatever you like. I mean, there's so much freedom for you to go and take", that that shows that, you know, that's the liberal dream

S You're right. And I remember just as an anecdote, but I think this kind of brings together these two narratives, which is that a couple of years ago, there was an anti-Trump protest in London, and I was asked to perform a poem so I went, performed the poem, and it was all a bit weird anyway, but afterwards, this guy came up to me and he was like, "Oh, hey, can I just ask you a couple questions" and he had a camera and everything. And I was like, "Oh, hang on, What's this for? Like, what is this?" and he just mentioned some YouTube channel. I'd never heard of it. And then he said, "Look, you just said in your poem that you know, Britain is racist. It's sexist. It's colonial. It's capitalist. You know? It's just awful." And he just said, "so why do you stay?" And so I just walked away? Right? So when I looked up who this guy was, what the Youtube channel was, you know, he is the alt right. He's like very much a big guy on the alt-right. And But what was interesting is that, you know, if we just take apart this moment here, it's like, he's angry that I've experienced the "liberal West", right? And then I'm daring to call it things like "racist" things like "colonial". And he's saying, by asking me, you know, why don't you go back?, what he's really saying is, in a sense, I suppose, is trying to expose to me that actually, you won't go back, because you're "barbaric culture", your "backwards" culture, you know, doesn't give you these "freedoms" that we give you. And so I think already, we're entering this cauldron of like, there's a lot of people saying a lot of things,

A because it sounds like that classic of like, "you wouldn't even be able to say that, if you were "back home" "

S Yes, absolutely.

A "So you should celebrate and be grateful for what you do have here"

S which is interesting, because I think what we're talking about now is like a third space as well. So we've got like, what I'm seeing in my head is liberals, fascists, and then it's kind of like, racialized people, right? Because it's kind of like you don't fit into the liberal West, not because you're a fascist, but because you're a person of color. So you're barbaric. You're uncivilized. All these tropes that were built throughout history, and which were built during the Enlightenment period, right. So the same period of time where you're creating these universal principles of freedom, you're also saying, but these people are inherently people whose land we should own in the name of freeing it, you know, we can enslave these people in the name of the free market in the name of, you know, producing goods for us to trade across the world to open up and liberalize things. So yeah, there's, there's lots of that kind of like cracks in this facade of liberalism, that are becoming very clear. Kind of maybe jumping to today, and like more, you know, what we're seeing around us right now. I think this year probably presents a multitude of examples that you could give. But yeah, what for you has been a moment or something that you think you can kind of say, "look, here is a great example of where liberal and fascist has just not proved to be oppositional in any real sense"?

A I think the topic on all of our minds this year has been the global pandemic. And I was in Sweden, you know, for work at the very beginning, in spring. And it kind of just became very clear that we had a country that is very proudly, historically social democratic, in a liberal democratic framework in a liberal framework, that all of a sudden was kind of actively pursuing a policy that I think can only be described as a policy of eugenics. Really, yeah, yeah, no, that sounds really dramatic. But to get to the heart of it, towards the beginning of the pandemic, Sweden, actively chose to pursue a strategy of allowing the Coronavirus to spread across the population. They always denied that it was herd immunity. But you know, we can deduce that the approach was a herd immunity approach. And whereas some countries like the UK, obviously, you know, after huge criticism kind of turned its back on that policy, Sweden chose to continue.

And what that actually meant is that there was no mass testing, there was no attempt at contact tracing. And at the same time, there wasn't any far reaching lockdown either. So you had none of those things. So, of course, there were some things like, stay at home to work if you can, but on the whole, you know, bars open, restaurants open, everything is open up. But if you're vulnerable, stay at home. If you think of the time that that was happening, that was the same time as pretty much every other country around Sweden was shutting down, you know, everywhere from Norway, Denmark to the rest of Europe, realised that you know, there's a big threat. We've just seen the threats from Italy, from China, we've seen what's happened. So we really want to protect everyone. Why I'm putting this in this context is because towards the beginning, there were a lot of narratives circulating around why Sweden was doing this. People were very, very protective of the policy. And one of the kind of main themes that emerged was that there was a need to stay open. And this is a democratic country, we can't shut everything down. We can't have police on the streets, we can't have fines for people who don't go out, you know, the "freest thing to do"- the way you know, we're following the science because this is what the experts are saying, but also it's a way of like maintaining this image of Sweden as a very "free" place

S in the name of liberty, we won't close down

A liberty, right. So in the name of all of these, you know, liberal ideals that I've just kind of, we've just talked about, society stayed open. But you know, from the very outset, we have, you know, just this glaring fact that okay, it's open for everyone, apart from anyone who's considered vulnerable, and that's, that's a huge chunk of the population. That's anyone who's old, anyone who is immunocompromised, and a lot of other people who just didn't know that they were vulnerable because a lot of people don't know they have honorable. So from the outset, you've got a policy

there, you've decided to have a policy rather than everyone, you know, staying in for a shorter, shorter period of time. You have a small group of people staying in for a really long timetime.

So yeah, it's a completely ableist kind of, kind of policy. And what we then kind of figured out because obviously, we didn't have as much info about what was going on at the beginning, was that the groups that have been affected were not only disabled people, elderly people, but also there's a massive overrepresentation of people of colour. So you know, it's, yeah, so you've got all of that. But then also, you know, months later, what we realize is that the death toll in Sweden is five times higher than the neighbour, Denmark and 10 times higher than neighbours, Norway, and Finland. So ultimately, you've got a policy here that has, I mean, it's just so controversial to even like, say this, you can't even say that we're sacrificing people in the name of a free society in a free economy, because that's just such a provocative thing to say. But ultimately, there is a sense that some people can just stay at home for unlimited amounts of time. And also, they're like, how much does their lives actually matter?

S You saying it like that you've explained it doesn't really sound that controversial? To be honest. Because, I mean, what else could you phrase that as, like, you've just said that in the name of freedom, some people's lives will have to be lost, you know, and, I think we've seen echoes of that also, in the kind of way that like wartime rhetoric has been used, where it's like, you know, "sacrifices will be made". And, you know, in the UK, we've had this thing of like, well, in the name of the economy, some people will have to die. And I think that's so interesting, cuz it goes back to when you're saying about, like, the free market as a, as a really important part of liberalism. So it's like almost the market has more value than the lives of you know, what you've just said, disabled people, people of color, anyone immunocompromised. And that, to me does sound like that's a genocidal policy, essentially, for a certain population, you're willing to say, you will die. But that's in the name of freedom, it's also just, you know, uphold this image.

A And because it's, you know, liberalism is not about collectivism, right, it's not about, you know, people acting together. So, you know, there is a way of avoiding death, and that is to just take extreme individual responsibility and just stay at home. And that, you know, what I mean, that it's all been kind of privatized, that responsibility is no longer something for the whole society. And, you know, you could make, you know, I wouldn't agree with it, but you could make an argument in a country, which is has like, you know, widespread poverty, widespread inequality, this kind of thing is, is the only option. You know, I'm not saying that it's the only option. But you could make that argument. But Sweden is literally, like, one of the richest countries in Europe and one of the most equal ones

S You mean, in terms of like, resource distribution?

A Yeah. Yeah. So it just doesn't, it just didn't make sense for Sweden to take this herd immunity. When analyzed from this angle, you could say, look, this is a eugenic, this policy of eugenics. But that's the kind of word you'd only really associate with fascism, right?

S Definitely, I'm sure you'd be shut down for saying that, right. But what your example actually brings to mind for me is like another kind of unnamed policy of, I suppose, like white supremacy or fascism that's not named for itself. And so I was recently reading um, Nadine El-Enany's book (B)ordering Britain. And she basically says that in 1981, immigration legislation is passed that means that if you have a parent who was born in the UK, it's much easier for you to access citizenship rights. Now, what she says is that at that time, in 1981, for you to have had a parent who was born in the UK, you were sort of 90% plus, you know, 95%, maybe likely to be white. So what this did, she

said is essentially mean that the government, the state begins to define Britishness as whiteness. So for you to be a British citizen, we also want you to be white. We want what counts as someone who's British to be someone who is white,

But what she says and I think it's really interesting and echoes what you're saying is she says, nobody said that this is a policy "to protect the white race", or, you know, this is a policy of white racial purity of Britain to maintain the superiority of the white race, because that then would be like, Oh my gosh, that's obviously a fascist discourse. That's obviously a nationalist, you know, right wing thing. Instead, it was just like, Yeah, no, this is just obviously what we have to do: border checks, controls, it's all very normal. It's all very natural. And I think zooming forward to now then the exact same realm of immigration legislation is this interesting thing, where in the name again, in the name of liberty, to protect our freedoms, protect our democracy, we have to use very illiberal measures such as deportation, such as detention at the border holding, you know, thousands of people who are seeking asylum, in essentially prisons. But, you know, actually, it's a type of internment, we don't have any sense of when you might be able to leave. And I think there's something really interesting there where it's like, we just turn a blind eye to this, because we don't seem to mind the idea that we're using authoritarian tools, we're using the opposite of you know, what you just said freedom of speech, freedom, freedom of law, sorry, rule of law, justice, these kinds of concepts, we're actually saying, to protect them, we have to kind of do the opposite to people who don't look like us. So for me, there's a real connection as well between like, liberalism using illiberal measures to protect white supremacy. That's the way I would put it. Yeah. Does that make sense?

A I think there's actually two interesting things going on here. Because first of all, I think this is the key point that we're coming to. It's the fact that liberalism just makes all of these immense, oppressions invisible. Right? They all are allowed to continue happening. It's just they're never named as what they are, but but they can still continue. And yeah, absolutely. And I think the second thing that we see is that there is a specific group of people that are protected no matter what, and that is people who are more white people who are more able bodied people who are cis and you know, straight and who are men, and no matter what it is, it seems these people are always protected. Yeah. Regardless of how we're dressing it up. Yeah. liberal or fascist

S This, to me. Uh, yeah, I agree. This gets to the heart of things. Because I guess the very clear reason for this, in my mind anyway, is that liberalism, fascism, at the same time as this whole debate is going on in Europe about who's a liberal who's a fascist. All European states, regardless of whether liberal fascists are colonizers. So what does it mean, right? If you could be liberal or fascist, but still be colonizing, still be extracting resources still be profiting off the labor, the dehumanization, the murder, the massacre of people of color in colonized places, to me that kind of says, Okay, one strong, strong link between fascism and liberalism seems to be white supremacy, like, is firstly unavoidable that if you're a person of color under either regime, you still gonna end up in a concentration camp that might be called a detention center, it might be called a prison and under fascism, it might be more overtly called the concentration camp. But actually, is this such a big difference?

A I mean, you know, the UK doesn't have a national Independent Living scheme that is universal for everyone who needs it. So anyone who's disabled and needs like personal care, personal assistance, it's not available to everyone, without any limits, it's very restricted. It's, you know, it's very bordered by kind of disability testing. And the idea that, okay, maybe not so much anymore, but until a couple of decades ago, where people were literally kept in institutions, you know, their whole lives. And that would be seen as the idea that that can all continue, I mean, for that person or institution, what what is the difference between living under a liberal regime or a faster fascist

regime, where your freedom is completely constructed just because you're born or because you are disabled?

S So suddenly, you know, these freedoms of liberalism, were never, it turns out, extended to everybody, even within the liberal society itself? And I think the example I always remember when it comes to this is that I think it's Nisha Kapoor, actually who I interviewed in season one, but she made a really good point in her book that at the same time that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is being drawn up in Europe. She says, you know, genocide was ongoing in the colonies. And I think, just to speak to what you're saying there. To me, what that's about is because some people weren't seen as human at the same time that human rights were being conceptualized. So what does it mean, then that as you're saying, disabled people are not seen as humans who are deserving of those liberal values, people of color are not seen as humans within that context of human rights. It kind of means to me that there's always going to be the possibility that those liberal values never have to extend beyond the parameter you want them to.

A Yeah. And there's no Golden Age, we can look back to either, because, you know, there's all kinds of we can look at an origin point being the French and American Revolution, we can even go as far back as that we can go to the enlightenment. Yeah. And we can see that at the same time as all of these fantastic bills of rights are being drawn up, you know, that was a time of massive slavery, massive colonialism where so you know, the universal rights of man were, you know, from the very outset when they were written down, just absolutely not applicable to all people because some people just weren't human enough.

S Exactly. And actually really exciting example of that in that moment is the Haitian Revolution, right. So the Haitian revolution happens immediately after the French Revolution in this kind of context that Haiti is a French colony. So it's like, hang on, and this is one of the biggest enslaved populations on this island. And they're like, okay, hang on, you're talking about freedom of Man, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. Sounds great. Sounds like something that would be very applicable to the situation of someone who's been enslaved by this nation. So they declare revolution, they declare their Republic, their independence. And immediately, it's like, Whoa, whoa, whoa, we said French Revolution, but not for you guys. And so I think that shows, you know, from in our very first moment, this is, you know, 1801, I think we're late 1700s. That, that this notion of legality, freedom, all of these these things that are kind of seen as like, the European Western freedoms that you all should be craving that you all should be working towards, you're progressing towards? Well, actually, when black enslaved people were claiming that at that same moment, they were told no, no, this isn't for you. And today, how do we talk about Haiti? "Oh, well, hopefully, it'll progress out of its underdevelopedness", you know, "hopefully, it'll come to be as modern and free as us", well hang on, who stopped it being so? I think there's a real contradiction at the heart of that.

A Even if we fast forward to British colonialism in India, where we know that there was a specific brand of British liberalism, which is basically, you know, the same kinds of values we're talking about, it was just so evident, who got, you know, to access these rights, and not obviously. The British colonial product was one of extreme plunder, and, you know, rule of people of color across the world at the same time. So let's take one of these values, self representation and government, that's obviously like a crucial liberal value. Like, even under, you know, during the I think it's the 1800s was talking about now, the British territories that were allowed access to this particular right, those were America, Australia, Canada, and then you had you had India that was just not considered as being, you know, sufficiently developed in terms of income of its "nature". It's basically just saying, well, you're not human enough, they're not going to get a vote, you're not going to get representation in Parliament, you're not gonna get none of that. So it's just very clear that the liberal

project has always been for people considered human. And there's always been this hierarchy of who is human and who is not.

S I think that is the crux of it, isn't it? It's like, to just bring it back round to, you know, to what you were saying right at the beginning about what somebody would say to me that, well, "it's only due to freedom of speech that you can say" that "it's only due to freedom expression that you can criticize the West so loudly", I think the reason that that is so disingenuous, is as you've just said, that actually I'm not seen as human. So we can pretend that there's this equal rights in this light kind of neutral space where, you know, I can call you a racist, you can call me a Paki, and that's all the same. There's no difference, right? It's like, Well, actually, there's a really big difference because one of those people isn't seen as human. And one is, and I think that, you know, just to give you material consequences of that, that means that some of us can be- I mean, Ruth Wilson Gilmore says it best, right? that under conditions that we live in, racism means premature death, essentially. And I think this this feels really linked to you know- racism is about dehumanization and dehumanization is underpinned by liberal values and liberalism.

Then, under liberalism, there will be premature death for people, whether that's through prison, whether that's through deportation, whether that's through, as you've said, you know, kind of benefits that will allow for you to actually live your life. support measures that will allow you to actually be able to survive, and not even just survive, but be able to access kind of what we deem to be important parts of having dignity as a human being. And I mean, within that example, anyway, there's all the contradictions, the fact that we'll actually will probably talk about freedom of speech when like, we know that people of color are surveilled. We know Muslims are surveilled. We know that, like you can't speak freely without being criminalized. And I just wanted to mention one more thing. Sorry, while I'm in this little thought bubble- which is that I remember the scholar, Santiago Slabodsky.

He talked about -what he was talking about was "genocidal conditions". This is, you know, his sort of framework. So he's talking about genocidal conditions, and particularly thinking about the Holocaust, that happens in Europe in the 1940s. And how the conditions that led up to this, he says, are conditions of liberalism, they're not conditions of facsism. So he sort of says fascism is only the sort of more explicit face of what liberals are doing anyway. And so he traces that, to understand the Nazi Holocaust, you need to look at the 1920s you need to look at the 1930s. You need to look preand I think, you know, he says the same thing is true with any genocidal conditions. And so he talks about today and he says, forget Donald Trump. You have Obama, you have Bush you have- and he talks about all this sort of, you know, pre what we now know are kind of, you know, I think more people are happy to say, "Oh, well, Donald Trump, he's a fascist, he's a racist", but it's like to actually create the conditions for fascism it's liberalism that does that. And it's liberals. And it's these values were, as you said earlier, just not giving a name to those things. So yeah, we're still gonna be doing drone strikes, we're still going to be, you know, incarcerating people indefinitely in Guantanamo Bay, we're still going to be going to war, imperialist kind of extraction ventures across the Middle East. So that, to me just feels like an important kind of way of thinking about it particularly as you talked about eugenics at the beginning, like genocidal conditions as a kind of part of liberalism.

A I think the Labour Party is a really good example. Because like, now, I just felt like the whole Labour Party's like, we love the EU, "we we can't believe Brexit happened!" And you just go back a few years, and you had like Yvette Cooper out there being like, you know, what, we do have to actually restrict benefits from European migrants, like, they can't get child benefits. I'm just thinking but you spent years like, laying the groundwork for what happened, you know, I'm not passing judgment, whether the EU is a good thing or a bad thing, whatever. But what I'm saying is that you

literally made it happen. And now you're like, yeah, and and that kind of feeds into the way that like, you know, the natural conclusion of a lot of kind of fascist horrible things are just constantly being laid through through liberals.

S Definitely, well, it's I think, I think, I think just to build on your same example, you know, the Nigel Farage, his Breaking Point poster that came out in 2016, - where it's like this queue of, you know, brownish men coming into the UK, and it's like, "there's too much" we need to "take back control". Everyone acted like "this is disgusting", "this is racist" "you have nothing to do with us" - you know, the political mainstream parties, I mean, at the same time, since like, at least 2011. If not, prior to that. They have been saying the exact same thing. They've been saying, "Oh, well, you know, you never know it could be security risk to let in the all these migrants, you know, you can't always be sure that they are just migrants, you know, this could be ISIS working under the scenes". You know, this was people like Michael Gove, David Cameron, Ian Duncan Smith, it wasn't just your Farages and your Tommy Robinsons and indeed Katie Hopkins. So I think as well that what you said there is important is, neither is it just like Katie Hopkins is completely distinct for David Cameron, David Cameron's completely distinct from, you know, Gordon Brown. It's like, actually, there's a real continuum that you can see across this spectrum. And so, for me, that's also where it's like, when we when we've kind of revealed this about liberalism. You know, it's also important to question whether the difference between like partisan politics is even that distinct when those same values are being kind of used by both parties to say, "this is what the West is", "this is what Britain is". And "this is what Britain is not" in a way that is always racialized.

A Absolutely.

S But my question then, usually at this point is, okay, so why does this binary exists, like, who benefits from there being this idea of the liberal and the fascist who is the opposite?

A It's an easy way for people who are white, rich, able bodied, cis, straight, men to continue enacting power, without it looking like an awful thing. Because, you know, you don't have the fascist labels anywhere, instead everything's happening in a very kind of invisible way. But it continues. And I think one point that kind of makes this very clear is an argument that is made by a guy called Costas Douzinas, who is a Greek academic, and he basically says that, look, neoliberalism, which is this kind of extreme form of market liberalism, where the market is kind of above everything, and privatization and all of this kind of stuff. The mainstreaming universalization of neoliberalism coincided with the universalization of human rights. So human rights, and neoliberalism become kind of global standards, or like are, you know, proposed as global standards at the same time. And it's no secret to us the extreme indignities terror of global capitalism, we know that so many people suffer, because of the way our economy is, and how it works because of the way wealth is transferred from ex-colonies to the ex-Metropole, the way that it's all set up. And if that can coexist with a code of human rights that is supposed to be for everyone. It's supposed to be global. You know, how's that even possible? you know, how- they, so in a sense, he argues that human rights is the vocabulary of the neoliberal system. It is the system that allows all of that to kind of stay in place at the same time as you having extreme moral authority.

S Well, well, that makes a lot of sense. And I think it's almost like the structural version of you know, that individual person who could feel good about it, it's like there's actually a moral authority on an institutional level like- I, when you're speaking, I was thinking about actually, you know, the World Bank and the IMF and these organizations who enact all these policies of extraction on the global south, leave them in huge debt and kind of force them to do the things in the name, again, of this, you just said of human rights, where it's like, your economy must be ruined, and you know,

devastated for the benefit of the global north, in order for you to really get nearer to human rights. And I think that that kind of, I don't know, I mean, there's probably, you know, maybe somebody to talk about the breakdown a binary there, but I think there's something there. That's really interesting. And it reminds me something that you've said before, to me, which this really blew my mind. And you said it, which was that a really interesting part of like, liberal freedoms is, you know, it's all about freedom of speech, freedom of expression, but never the freedom to, you know, have universal basic income, the freedom to have food on your table. And I think that material difference is so interesting,

A because that's what it obscures right. But the fact that neoliberalism can exist at the same time as human rights just means that human rights have nothing to say about socio economic equality. It's, it's kind of like, you know, your ultimate freedoms are rule of law, freedom of speech, democracy, but never the right to have food on your table. Like, that's never been the priority of human rights. And that's another reason why, it's another reason why we can't see it as a project for universal freedom. Because if that conception of freedom doesn't include actual material well being, what's the point?

S Yeah, yeah. and who is it for? Because that, I think that cuts to the chase, where it's like, this is upholding a real supremacy because, you know, not only is it clearly invested in colonialism and whiteness, but it's also this, I think, what you mentioned about capitalism. Now that's so important, because that, to me, explains why it's so hidden. I mean, I think Noam Chomsky writes about this, right? Like, how do you manufacture consent for such a terrorizing regime of economic organization, and it's only because you kind of just say to people, "hey, this is lovely, this is all everyone's free". And I think this is where you get a lot of people internalizing that idea, as one of you know, if you just work hard enough, you can get whatever you want, work your way to the top. And I think that is so insidious. It's something that you know, a lot of people of color a lot of poor people take on because we believe that the reason we are poor is not because of, you know, material illiberalism of the UK in the sense of like, we're going to cut ,we're gonna, through austerity, we're going to cut all welfare, we're gonna slash and privatized anything that may kind of contribute to your, your nurturing and your dignity. And instead, you just work for it, bro. Like, you just do your best and you can get it?

A Well, I mean, I think one example, just the other week, I was watching TV that just made this so kind of blatantly obvious to me was. So like, I don't know, if you've been following the whole, like, Boris Johnson has kind of, he's going back on his agreement with the EU, and is apparently prepared to break international law because you've signed the big treaty or Brexit treaty. And now he's apparently going to go back on that. And that breaks international law. And, you know, the head of the EU Commission is really, really angry about this. And she's kind of made statements in that, you know, we're gonna take legal action against Britain, and it's just taking up so much space, and you know what? yeah, yeah, they've broken international law, and the EU wants to take Britain to court. Fair enough. At the same time, as in all of these countries, 10s of thousands of people have died avoidable deaths from a pandemic. And there's literally no one's taking any legal action at all. Thousands of people in this country have died because of benefits being removed.

S hundreds of thousand people, austerity killed hundreds of thousands of people

A right. and there's no no legal action being taken, even though the like, number one, right on every single bill of rights is always just like everyone has a right to life. So we can see that the whole kind of legal framework economic framework does- here we see that the liberal kind of premise even falls on its own premises, right?

S Yeah, and that's brilliant, because I think what you've just said, though, is like, yet again, another, you know, false facade of this whole thing, which is that the I think one of the big ideas and like all of this liberal framework is that at the end of the day, like everyone can get their rights because even if you don't get them the first time around, you can kind of appeal through the justice system, right. So your right to property is taken from you. Well, you just go through the justice system. And what you do is send somebody else to prison. And so I think that also just that whole premise, that whole kind of setup of like, "I had a right to property, but you don't have a right as somebody who's sort of you know, either I don't know, take my car or robbed my house, you don't now have a right you forfeited your right to live basically, in society as a member of society". And I remember growing up like that was a really normal, you know, kind of common sense kind of thinking where it's like, if you don't fulfill your responsibilities as a citizen, which is how was often framed, then you don't deserve your rights as a citizen. And I think that's really interesting, too, within this universal idea of liberalism, you also then have this thing of like, rights and responsibilities, because it automatically creates deserving and undeserving human beings under this banner of like, access to freedom. So not only do we have like this first rupture of like, humans who have free versus those who are not human at all, you also have within humans who are free, like the deserving humans and the non deserving.

So you can actually still have a liberal regime under which, you know, huge swathes of the population are in prison, unable to access any of those freedoms. Because that's just part of how we uphold freedom is to make some people unfree. And I think that kind of really blatant contradiction, just just throws up I think what you were saying there about the legal system as well, because it's like, well, who does that liberal legal system benefit? it's about upholding some kind of justice, but it's a justice, that's already premised on this idea that like freedom isn't for everybody. And then like what you lose is freedom. Actually, that's the only thing we can take away from you and punish you with.

A It's the fact that you know, there's no consideration taken to structural conditions that cause inequality and structural violence. The fact that we're saying this, but from a liberal premise, that doesn't even make sense – because it's not, you know, structural violence doesn't count as violence, right? Under a liberal paradigm – then if an individual causes harm to another individual, *that* is violence;

S yeah! The only violence is hate crimes

A right - whereas mass impoverishment, mass detention, these just don't count as violences, they don't count as murder, they don't count –

S it reminds me of every time you see like, every few years there's a story of a child refugee who's found dead washed up on Britain's shores – and the Home Secretary, the Home Office, the Prime Minister, they all say this is so sad this is tragedy is just so devastating – absolutely like as you say, avoiding the fact that – there are *structural reasons* this person died. Because you made safe and cheap crossings illegal. You made it so that they have to go through the most dangerous possible circumstances to get here, and they died. And then you're acting like "oh, if they'd only made it, we would have given the freedom of li-" no you wouldn't you would probably have detained them, hoped through psychological warfare, to break their will and make them go back to the place they were fleeing from in the first place

A yeah and I think that's also what makes it easy to uphold that binary – because if we only define violence and murder as something an individual does to another individual, then it's like *of course liberals aren't fascists* you know what I mean?

S and I think this is you know – always got to bring this up every episode – for me this comes back to the Counter Terrorism discourse as well, where its like, terrorists are these random individuals who do acts of violence, to counter them we’re going to have to keep watching out for random individuals, see them, stop them, stop them at the border – but if there was another understanding which was that “huh? When there’s a structurally violent world where people are impoverished, where people are terrorised, where people are racially profiled, where people are made to not be human, is it likely that there might be interpersonal or individual acts of violence?” I think yeah, highly likely, but when you’ve exceptionablised as you’ve said, violence that people perpetrate and call it terrorism, you then hide the fact that every day the state is violent.

And you know Noam Chomsky, he talks about how, before 9/11, every south American country had its own 9/11 caused by the United States and it had millions of them you know, forget one, it had one every single day – and since 9/11 think Iraq, Afghanistan – and a million other conflicts, where its like, “these are not conflicts”, it’s just one regime trying to kill the people of another, and that’s just sort of “collateral”, that’s needed to maintain – even, actually, in the name of freedom isn’t it? “Operation Enduring Freedom” that was the name of the invasion of Afghanistan

A and it is so wild how you’ll get countries that are like doing – that kind of introduce measures to ensure freedom, by restricting freedom? I’m just thinking of like Denmark, another one of my favourite countries to talk about. I’m talking about the ghetto scheme, the ghetto package in Denmark – I’ll take it from the top. Its been in place for ten years and it’s kind of a big “desegregation programme” in Denmark. It’s pitched as a way of “integrating people” that’s kind of how its touted. The basis of this is identifying certain areas in Denmark as “ghettos” and in order to be a ghetto your area has to have over 1000 people and at least 50% “non-Western” background

S well there you go!

A and on top of that you have to fulfil a few other criteria too, so something about unemployment rates, rates of criminality, educational achievement

S so be poor people of colour? Living together in close quarters?

A yeah, exactly, and em, yeah so in order to sort of “deghettoize” Denmark, which is the whole idea, they have a whole range of different things they’re doing. So one which I’d say is wild is that parents who live in “ghettos” have to send their children to pre-school from the age of one under the pretext that that’s the way they’ll learn “Danish values”

S wow, from the age of one?

A yeah. So like you know in order to make sure these children understand what “true freedom” is, we’re *forcing* their parents, no other parents, we’re forcing parents of colour to send their children to preschool and not anyone else. The irony of that is just like – and on top of that you’ve had things like, in certain areas, for limited periods of time, certain “crimes” have been doubly punished. You know, so your sentence will just be doubled –

S just because of where you’ve committed a crime?

A yeah and that’s just a coded way of being like, if you’re a person of colour, you do have a double penalty – and you know, for all talk of “sharia justice systems taking over in Europe”, they’ve literally just introduced a *dual legal system*.

S wow

A themselves. For people of colour

S actually just, cos one thing that's interesting there, with the education classes for one year olds, is like you're kind of admitting that actually, liberal values are not so pervasive that it's just enough to grow up in Denmark and you'll know them. It's almost admitting that if you're a person of colour you're not going to even experience these rights that we tell you you should know, so then we're going to have to teach you what we purport to be, like a propaganda exercise essentially

And the second thing that I find interesting there is that what you were just saying about the legal system. Because I think something that quite a few scholars in the UK have been saying for quite a while about the UK is that there are 2 justice systems – there's the criminal justice system that we see and hear about, but then there's what they call the "parallel justice system" which is very secretive, operates through secret courts and secret proceedings and very much only applies to racialised populations and through that justice system you're much more precarious because punitive measures include your citizenship being stripped, being revoked, being deported, all these kind of measures – so you're right there is such an interesting thing about "omg we've got to protect our justice system, our freedoms" but at the same time we're not even applying those freedoms to everybody and we have a whole separate justice system for those people.

A yeah! And most talk of kind of "parallel systems" is always been about "these communities are doing- they don't integrate" – when in fact, it's the state that's actually implementing a double system. And you know I think the pinnacle of the Danish ghetto scheme is the idea that the kind of characteristics of these ghettos needs to change – after 4 years if you're still on this ghetto list, if you still fulfil those criteria that I outlined, then you get designated a "hard ghetto", now if you become a hard ghetto, you need to reduce the amount of public housing in your area to 40%. And the only way of doing that is literally forcibly evicting people from their homes and privatising them, and selling them to people so that you replace people of colour, poor people of colour, with richer, whiter, people who just come in and – and it's just like

S so you're not getting rid of the conditions that create these so-called ghettos, you're just removing the people

A so ultimately all these things, a double legal system, a double education system, random dispersal, without treating structural conditions, this is all happening in a country which is also like famed for its EXTREME Liberalism, its civil liberties, its freedom and democracy, it's the "happiest country in the world", they introduced gay marriage there before everyone else did! And this is what strikes me as so wild that this binary of liberal and fascism – literally just has to go, in the bin

S that reminds me also of something we talked about a while back – where that was that video, it was more than a video, but I remember seeing a video about in Sweden, because you're talking about teaching Danish values, it was like, teaching refugees, about how to be "western" you know, like how to not be "sexist", and I think it was really interesting, that "lack of misogyny" was posited as this western value, when obviously, every woman across America, the UK, western Europe, talks all the time about "rape culture", about misogyny, lack of consent, and all the kinds of different gender based violence, and sexism that we see, and yet when it comes to suddenly refugees and people of colour it's like "we can teach you how to be less sexist" and but it's within what you're saying, that forced kind of coercion of like "learning our values" – and if you don't – and this goes back to Santiago Slabodsky's argument about genocidal conditions – the liberal will never tell you there's a condition attached to this, so it's like "learn our values", but then if you don't, the thing

that isn't said is, "if you don't, you know, we'll deport you, or if you don't, we'll put you in prison", or "if you don't, we'll make your life unliveable"

A yeah. I mean – that also goes to the whole idea of the way kind of "integration" is always just seen as an "exchange of values", rather than a need to ensure equality – like economic, socioeconomic equality. Because that's never going to be part of the liberal vision, right?

S no. no. I think that's bang on. And its worth maybe stopping at that for a second, because I think integration is seen as one of those parts of how you make a liberal democracy work is that everybody has to concede to its values and that is called integration, but you know, in the UK, always, the kind of "offence" that Muslims and people of colour do I think particularly Muslims, it's like they "live parallel lives", "they don't integrate", they kind of have "these no-go zones" all of this stuff. But as you say, no one is talking about the economic and structural conditions that mean that people of colour live generally together because of intergenerational poverty and white flight – so white people leave those areas, they leave the worst housing, and poor people who are generally the newest migrants to an area, move into them – and because of racism people want to live close together, of course you do – you don't want to live out in a white suburb – I wouldn't want to! But the point being – when you dress it up as "they're the enemies of freedom" because they're trying to stay safe or because of structural inequality. There's a whole – there's yeah – I think we've picked kind of a million holes in liberalism today and maybe one thing to just, even this out a bit, is to just say that fascists, I think, often show, within Europe, many liberal tendencies, right? And as we said at the beginning, fascist are very invested in "freedom of speech" they're always talking about "free expression" and all these types of liberal freedoms, which I think just proves again how illiberal those freedoms are

A yeah I think one trend you can see across Europe – we often try to differentiate between social democrats, liberal democrats, versus fascists – when so much of European public policy has been anti-immigration but redistribution within the country. Like a nationalist social democracy

S social democracy within our borders only

A yeah exactly – and at the same time as having extremely nationalist and extremely racist policies. And I don't know – the Polish government that just won a few weeks ago, that was their whole selling point right, it was contending in the Polish election was the Law and Justice Party which won, versus the party that's much more liberal and queer friendly and the fact that this party that won was a conservative government that I think people would maybe say is, has fascist tendencies, actually was redistribution – which is why it had such a, broad appeal among people – redistributing amongst people in the country, so benefiting people at the same time as being extremely queerphobic which was one of the focal points of this election – and of course, anti-migrant, racist which is a classics. So it does complicate that binary of who is the liberal and who is the fascist.

S and actually I just want to pick up on what you said because there's an increasing idea that liberalism and queer rights go hand in hand and this is just very much part of liberalism, is queer rights, but something that's always important to think about is like how the state conveniently use that when they want to – just a classic example the UK's border and detention and the way that many many asylum seekers to the UK are LGBTQ and they're usually seeking asylum because it's not safe for them to live any kind of safe life wherever they're coming from, and what the UK border force do is essentially humiliate people in a really homophobic way and make you "prove" you need asylum, "prove" you're queer etc etc, and you can imagine the kinds of things that they ask. And I think one of the interesting things is that then they deport people back to these places – now, this

means that those peoples human rights will be violated – there’s a kind of consenting here to deporting you even though we know you’re going to experience violation of your human rights and safety, you could even be killed if your deported, but we’re going to do it anyway. and at the same time we are the queer-friendly west we are liberal, we love queer rights, we’re going to have Pride. And I think that’s just an interesting example of how liberalism can co-opt many things into whilst still, creating genocidal conditions for those same people

Side by side with that example, representation of people of colour and BAME and “we’re all about representation” and I think it goes back to what you said about individualism, not collectivism. Because we like to have the people that we marginalise, as individuals we want to showcase, but we don’t actually want to extend any kind of – real genuine structural justice to anybody – does that make sense?

A yeah it makes a lot of sense. And it’s reflected in the extreme focus on “honour-based violence”, which is just like, one of these terms we love to hear! If you genuinely believe this is this extreme form of misogyny and queer phobia we’ve never seen before because of these completely “barbaric” people, it’s like – then why would you deport these people and not let these people in? it just doesn’t make any sense

S and I think that’s the thing, there’s so many contradictions! And just one more thing on that honour violence discourse. It’s like hey! If we just called all domestic violence domestic violence, what would happen? Would we actually have to fund services for survivors, and hold to account a justice system that doesn’t ever help victims? Instead you juts go “honour based” we can’t get that! That’s so cultural and nothing to do with any form of misogyny we’ve ever seen before! But I think the point you’ve made is so funny – if you were so concerned, why would you continue to violate these people’s rights

But yeah that’s a classic. So I think at this stage there’s just so much that we’ve said and so much I hope for people to reflect on – I certainly feel that’s a lot for me to reflect on. And the only question that really remains for me – whilst this binary is well and truly in the bin – what are we left with? What is a better way for us to go forward? We don’t want to keep applying this binary of liberal and fascist, so could you suggest maybe a better framework for us to think about the world, whether that’s some of the things we talked about – whether you want us to think more about genocidal conditions, or colonialism, what could you suggest that we really need to be putting our attention to as opposed to this binary?

A so I think its whatever system we’re under, the recognition that you know, capitalism neoliberalism, white supremacy, racism, basically underpins it all – you know/ it’s a question of whether it is being spoken aloud, under a fascist kind of regime, or whether it’s being cloaked by human rights and the liberal order, and kind of, just always try and identify, who has access to resources, who has access to wealth – and kind of, if we understand that those inequalities exist everywhere, then I think we will be able to actually start thinking about making structural change – and that is a way out of this

S that’s amazing, thank you *so so* much. I feel like, yeah, particularly that final point – that’s given us a lot to think about. Thank you so so much it’s been a real pleasure to have you and yeah I can’t wait for everyone to go throw liberalism and fascism into their own personal bins!

Thanks for joining me

Thank you for listening to this episode of Breaking Binaries. I hope you, like me, can take something from our guest this week. Look out for episodes fortnightly and if you enjoy, please share. The music you've been hearing is made by an old high school friend, that came through, so shoutout to Violence Jack at @getviolencejack online. Thanks to all my guests for chatting to me every week and helping us to think a little more critically, and I hope, humbly, about our world.

I do believe that part of the way we transform the world is by transforming the ways we think about it. Thank you for listening. I've been your host, Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan, bye!